EPA Fact Sheet:

Asbestos Sampling Results

March 2000

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Background

In response to local concerns and news articles, an EPA Emergency Response Team, in coordination with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (MDPHHS), began sampling for asbestos in Libby in December 1999.

In December, the team collected air, dust, soil (yard, garden, driveway), and insulation samples. These samples were taken at 32 residences and 3 businesses as well as several potential "hot spots" that are associated with historical vermiculite mining activities in Libby. These hot spots included the former expansion plant area, the former railroad loading facility, and Rainey Creek Road.

Sampling results

We now have the results from the soil, dust and insulation sampling as well as from the re-analysis of the indoor air sampling.

Sampling results: Indoor Air

Inhalation (breathing in) of asbestos fibers is the exposure route that poses the greatest risks to human health. Asbestos fibers that get into the lungs can be very damaging, causing a variety of adverse health effects such as asbestosis and lung cancers.

We released the initial results from the indoor air sampling the week of January 31, 2000. This analysis was designed to identify areas with the greatest potential health risks.

In the first analysis, of the 32 homes and 3 businesses sampled, we detected asbestos fibers greater than 10 microns in two homes, at the former expanding plant and at the railroad loading facility. One home and the two former vermiculite processing areas had asbestiform mineral fibers (the kind of asbestos associated with the Libby mine). We found chrysotile asbestos (the kind formerly used for

floor tiles, pipe insulation, etc.) in the other home.

In February, we re-analyzed these indoor air samples in order to identify lower concentrations of asbestos fibers that may be present.

In the re-analysis we identified two additional homes with asbesti-form fibers associated with the Libby Mine.

At these sites where the longer asbestos fibers were detected, we will take action to reduce or eliminate the source of exposure. By doing so, we can reduce risks to human health from asbestos.

We also found 11 locations with asbestiform mineral fibers shorter than 5 microns.

At the other 16 locations, we did not detect asbestos fibers in the indoor air samples.

Sampling results: Dust

The results from the dust samples show 1 home with a Libby asbestiform fiber greater than 5 microns. At 7 homes, we detected Libby asbestiform fibers shorter than 5 microns.

At 31 homes we detected chrysotile fibers. Of these, 14 were less than 5 microns, 8 were 5-10 microns and 9 were greater than 10 microns. According to the available scientific information, chrysotile fibers are fairly common in the industrialized world.

Sampling results: Insulation

The results from insulation samples show that 3 of the homes sampled had insulation with an asbestiform mineral fiber content of 1-2%. Seven properties had insulation with less than 1% asbestiform mineral fibers (trace). Two properties had a trace amount of chrysotile asbestos.

Sampling results: Soil

The results from soil samples taken from people's yards and gardens show that 2 of the homes sampled had soil with an asbestiform mineral fiber content of 1.5-2%. Seventeen homes had soil with less than 1% asbestiform mineral fibers (trace).

On-going work

In March, EPA undertook an additional round of residential sampling. In this round, indoor air, dust and insulation (if present) were sampled in approximately 40 homes as well as a number of public buildings. We have now sampled a total of approximately 80 locations.

We have sent these samples to the laboratory for preparation and analysis and hope to have the results back by May, 2000.

As always, we will work with the community and get the results out as quickly as possible.

In January, the team took *ambient air samples* at four locations around the city of Libby. During the most recent sampling round (March), EPA also took several *ambient air samples* at the mine in the vicinity of the tailings pile. We will begin recording ambient air measurements monthly from May through October 2000.

Upcoming Activities

- March 22: Public meeting regarding sampling results (Memorial Gym)
- March 23: Open house regarding medical testing & sampling (VFW)
- March 24: Open house regarding medical testing & sampling (Troy HS)
- March 25: Health Fair in Troy
- April: Sampling more homes
- May 2000: Latest sampling results due back, public meeting & fact sheet
- May 2000: Medical testing begins

For more information

Community members are encouraged to stop by the EPA Information Center in downtown Libby (501 Mineral Avenue) or contact any of the team members listed below. The Information Center is open weekdays and is a good place to get more information, ask questions or express concerns. The phone number is (406) 293-6194.

Stop by anytime!

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